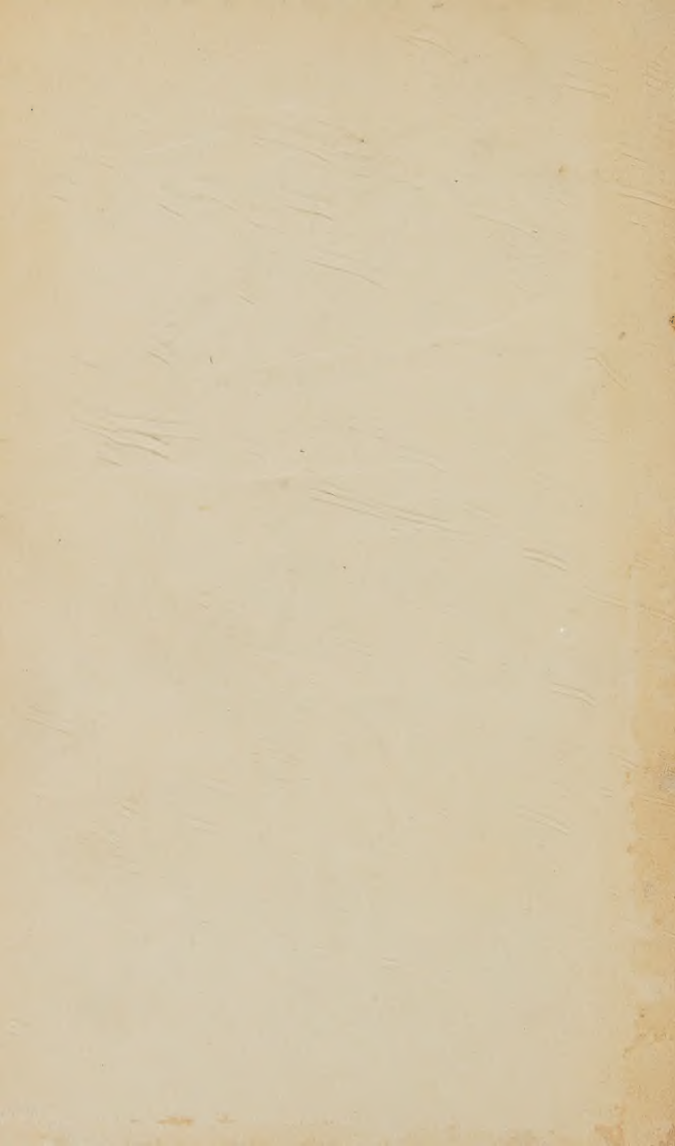




bc

PS 3521 .I38 C5 1916

Kilmer, Joyce, 1886-

The circus, and other essays



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

THE CIRCUS

AND OTHER ESSAYS

By
JOYCE KILMER



NEW YORK
LAURENCE J. GOMME
1916

3521
.I38
C5
1916

COPYRIGHT, 1916
BY LAURENCE J. GOMME

TO
MY FATHER

MOST of these essays appeared first in the *New York Times Magazine*, and to the owner and the editor of that publication I am grateful for permission to reprint. Others are reprinted by the courtesy — which is thankfully acknowledged — of *Harper's Weekly*, and the John J. Mitchell Company. I am deeply indebted to Alden March, Esq., Editor of the *New York Times Magazine*, for advice and encouragement, and to J. Arthur Murphy, Esq., of Mahwah, New Jersey, for valuable assistance in preparing the manuscript for the press.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE CIRCUS	1
THE ABOLITION OF POETS	14
NOON-HOUR ADVENTURING	22
SIGNS AND SYMBOLS	34
THE GREAT NICKEL ADVENTURE	38
THE URBAN CHANTICLEER	45
DAILY TRAVELING.	53
INCONGRUOUS NEW YORK	58
IN MEMORIAM: JOHN BUNNY	63
THE DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS	71

THE CIRCUS

. . .

I

RESTRAINT is perhaps the most conspicuous literary virtue of the artists in words who have the pleasant task of describing in programs, in newspaper advertisements, and on posters, the excellences of circuses. The litterateur who, possessed of an intimate knowledge of the circus, merely calls it "a new, stupendous, dazzling, magnificent, spectacular, educational, and awe-inspiring conglomeration of marvels, mysteries, mirth, and magic," deserves praise for a verbal economy almost Greek. For he is not verbose and extravagant, he is taciturn and thrifty; he deliberately uses the mildest instead of the strongest of the adjectives at his disposal.

Shyly, it seems, but in fact artfully, he uses modest terms — "new," for example, and "spectacular" and "educational." These are not necessarily words of praise. An epidemic may be new, an earthquake may be spectacular, and even a session of school may be educational. Yet the adjectives proper to these catastrophes are actually applied — in letters of gold and silver and purple — to the circus!

The laureate of the circus, with an aesthetic

shrewdness which places him at once on a level with Walter Pater (whose description of the "Mona Lisa," by the by, is an admirable example of circus press-agent writing) considers, and rejects as too bewilderingly true, the mightiest of the adjectives that fit his theme. Discreetly he calls it "new" instead of "immemorial"; "educational" instead of "religious." He does not, as he might, call the circus poetic, he does not call it aristocratic, he does not call it democratic. Yet all these great words are, as he well knows, his to use. The consciousness of his power makes him gentle.

His abnegation becomes the more startlingly virtuous when it is considered that he resists the temptation to use that fascinating device, paradox. For the circus is paradox itself — this reactionary and futuristic exhibition, full of Roman chariots and motor cycles, of high romance and grotesque realism, this demonstration of democracy and aristocracy, equality and subordination, worldliness and religion.

The press agent may, without fear of logical contradiction, call the circus religious. In the old days, he frequently called it a "moral exhibition." This was to forestall or answer the attacks of the Puritan divines of New England, who railed against the great canvas monster which invaded the sanctity of their villages.

"Moral" was justly used. For surely courage, patience, and industry are the three qualities most obviously exhibited by the silk-and-span-

gle clad men and women who dance on the perilous wire, fly through space on swiftly swinging bars, and teach a spaniel's tricks to the man-eating lion.

But the religious value, the formally religious value, of the circus is even more obvious than its moral value. For the circus, more than any other secular institution on the face of the earth, exemplifies—it may be said, flaunts—that virtue which is the very basis of religion, the virtue of faith.

Now, faith is the acceptance of truth without proof. The man who is told and believes that something contrary to his experience will happen has faith. And he who considers the psychology of the audience at a circus, he who (there are scientists sufficiently egotistic) looks into his own soul while a troupe of aerial acrobats are before his physical eyes, will see faith, strong and splendid.

It is not (as some pessimists who never went to a circus would have us believe) the expectation that the performer will fall and be dashed to pieces that makes people enjoy a dangerous act. People are like that only in the novels of D. H. Lawrence and the merry pastoral ballads of John Masefield. The circus audience gets its pleasure chiefly from its wholly illogical belief that the performer will not fall and be dashed to pieces; that is, from the exercise of faith. The audience enjoys its irrational faith that Mme. Dupin will safely accomplish the irrational feat

of hanging by her teeth from a wire and supporting the weight of all the gold and pink persons who theoretically constitute her family. They enjoy the exercise of this faith, and they enjoy its justification. They really believe, just because a particularly incredible-looking poster tells them so, that there are in the side-show a man with three legs, a woman nine feet tall, and a sword swallower. They give up their money gladly, not to find that the poster was wrong, but because they have faith that it is right. There are no rationalists at the circus.

The audience has faith, and the performers — where would they be without it? — in small fragments, red and white on the tanbark floor. "If the sun and moon should doubt," remarked William Blake, "they'd immediately go out." If the lady who rides the motor cycle around the interior of the hollow brass ball, or the gentleman who balances a pool table, two lighted lamps and a feather on his left ear should doubt, they would go out just as promptly. The Peerless Equestrienne believes that she will land on her feet on the cantering white horse's broad rosined back after that double cart-wheel. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down. By faith the Eight Algerian Aerial Equilibrists stayed up.

You may, of course, try this on your son. As he absorbs the strawed grape juice (degenerate substitute for the pink lemonade of antiquity!), munches the sibilant popcorn and the peanuts which the elephants declined, you may pour

into his ears this disquisition on the religiosity of the greatest show on earth. In fact, the best time to preach to a child is while he is staring, with eyes as round as the balloons he is soon to acquire, at the splendors of the three rings. For then there is not the slightest chance of his answering you back, or hearing you.

They are modern enough for any one, these wandering players. The gymnasts are at home on motor cycles, the clowns sport with burlesque aeroplanes. Yet they are wholesomely reactionary in other respects than those of having chariot races and such unaging feats of skill and strength as may have cheered the hearts of Caesar's legionaries. They are reactionary in that they turn man's newest triumphs into toys. The motor cycle loses its dignity and is no longer an imposing proof of the truth of materialistic philosophy when a girl, built, it seems, of Dresden china, rides it on one wheel over hurdles and through a hoop of flame. And see! Yorick himself, with his old painted grin and suit of motley, makes a Blériot the butt of infinite jest.

The circus is vulgar. Its enemies say so; its friends, with grateful hearts assent. It is *vulgar*, of the crowd. To no play upon the stage can this lofty praise be given. For the circus as it is today would thrill and amuse and delight not only the crowd that today see it, but the crowd that might come from the days before the Flood, or from the days of our great-grandchildren's children. When Adam watched with pleased

astonishment an agile monkey leap among the branches of an Eden tree, and laughed at the foolish face of a giraffe, he saw a circus. Delightedly now would he sit upon a rickety chair beneath a canvas roof, smell the romantic aroma of elephant and trampled grass, and look at wonders.

So it is that the vulgarity of the appeal of the circus — its democracy, if you prefer — has no temporal or geographic limits. And the performers themselves are a democracy — the acrobat who somersaults before death's eyes, the accomplished horseman, the amazing contortionist, the graceful juggler — all these are made equal by the ring, and, furthermore, they must compete for the applause of the throng with roller-skating bears, trained seals, and chalk-faced clowns. Yet there is aristocracy of the ring, and the subordination that Dr. Johnson praised. For here struts the ringmaster, with cracking whip, imperious voice, and marvelous evening clothes; the pageant with which the great show opened had its crowned queen; and even every troop of performing beasts has its four-footed leader.

The stage's glories have been sung by many a poet. But the circus has had no laureate; it has had to content itself with the passionate prose of its press agent. The loss is poetry's, not the circus's. For the circus is itself a poem and a poet — a poem in that it is a lovely and enduring expression of the soul of man, his mirth, and

his romance, and a poet in that it is a maker, a creator of splendid fancies in the minds of those who see it.

And there are poets in the circus. They are not, perhaps, the men and women who make their living by their skill and daring, risking their lives to entertain the world. These are not poets; they are artists whose methods are purely objective. No, the subjective artists, the poets, are to be found in the basement, if the show is at the Garden, or, if the show be outside New York they are to be found in the little tents — the side-shows. This is not a mere sneer at the craft of poetry, a mere statement that poets are freaks. Poets are not freaks. But freaks are poets.

Rossetti said it. "Of thine own tears," he wrote, "thy song must tears beget. O singer, magic mirror hast thou none, save thine own manifest heart." Behold, therefore, the man on whom a crushing misfortune has come. He puts his grief into fair words, and shows it to the public. Thereby he gets money and fame. Behold, therefore, a man whom misfortune touched before his birth, and dwarfed him, made him a ridiculous image of humanity. He shows his misfortune to the public and gets money and fame thereby. This man exhibits his lack of faith in a sonnet-sequence; that man exhibits his lack of bones in a tent. This poet shows a soul scarred by the cruel whips of injustice; this man a back scarred by the tattooer's needle.

But the freaks would not like to change places

with the poets. The freaks get large salaries (they seem large to poets), and they are carefully tended, for they are delicate. See, here is a man who lives although his back is broken. There is a crowd around him; how interested they are! Would they be as interested in a poet who lived although his heart was broken? Probably not. But then, there are not many freaks.

II

WHEN Tom Gradgrind (who had, you remember, robbed the Coketown Bank, and been saved from punishment by the amiable intervention of Sleary's Circus) was living out his exile somewhere in South America, he often longed, Charles Dickens tells us in the engaging tale called "Hard Times," to be back in England with his sister. But what phase of his dismal boyhood and wasted later years did he see in his homesick dreams? What episodes of his life in England did it give him pleasure to relive in memory?

Dickens does not tell us. But no one who has read "Hard Times" and seen a circus needs to be told. The repentant exile, toiling under the tropic sun, had no affectionate recollections of Stone Lodge, his father's dreary mansion in Coketown, with its metallurgical cabinet, its conchological cabinet, and its mineralogical cabinet. Nor was it with anything approaching happiness that he thought of the Coketown Bank, the scene of some years of dull labor and of one moment of moral catastrophe.

He remembered, we may be sure, two things. He remembered appearing, with blackened face, an immense waistcoat, knee breeches, buckled shoes, and a mad cocked hat, as one of the comic servants of Jack the Giant-Killer at a certain Grand Morning Performance of Sleary's Circus. At the time he had been a fugitive from justice, but not even his fear and shame could keep his heart from stirring as he smelled the exhilarating odor of tanbark, trampled grass, and horses; heard the blare of the band, saw the glaring lights and the encircling tiers of applauding people, and knew that he — he, Tom Gradgrind, the oppressed, the crushed, the scientifically educated — was really and truly a circus performer!

And the other recollection, which, after the lapse of many years, still made his heart beat more quickly, had to do with a gap in the pavilion in which Sleary's Circus once held forth in a suburb of Coketown — a gap through which young Tom Gradgrind delightedly beheld the "graceful equestrian Tyrolean flower-act" of Miss Josephine Sleary, and strained his astonished young eyes to watch Signore Jupe (none other than Sissy's father) "elucidate the diverting accomplishments of his highly trained performing dog Merrylegs."

And the reason why Sleary's Circus played so glorious a part in the memory of this broken exile was that it had brought into his most prosaic life all the poetry that he had ever known. Sur-

rounded with facts, crammed with facts, educated and governed according to a mechanical system which was an extraordinary foreshadowing of our modern "efficiency," he was allowed two visits to an enchanted realm, two draughts of the wine of wizardry. Twice in his life he was mysteriously in communion with poetry.

There has been much talk recently about a renaissance of poetry, and people have become excited over the fact that so many thousands of copies of Edgar Lee Masters' book have been sold, and so many more thousands of copies of the late Rupert Brooke's *Collected Poems*. This is all very pleasant, but it doesn't mean that there has been a rebirth of poetry. Poetry cannot be reborn, for poetry has never died.

The circus draws us by the thousands to watch "desperately dangerous displays of unrivaled aerialism," and "the acme of expert equitation and acrobatic horsemanship" beneath the Diana-guarded roof of Madison Square Garden; even so it drew our fathers and their fathers before them to rickety wooden benches propped against great swaying canvas walls, in the days when Robinson and Lake displayed the wonders of the world in glorious rivalry with Hemings, Cooper and Whitby. Even so will the circus flourish in the days to come, when aeroplanes are cheaper than motor cars, and the war that began in August, 1914, is but a thing of dates and names in dusty text-books. For poetry is immortal. And the circus is poetry.

What is the function of poetry? Is it not to blend the real and the ideal, to touch the commonplace with lovely dyes of fancy, to tell us (according to Edwin Arlington Robinson), through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said? And is not this exactly what the circus does? Most of its charm is due to the fact that all its wonders are in some way connected with our ordinary life. The elephant in his enclosure at the Zoölogical Gardens is merely a marvel; when he dances the tango or plays the cornet he allies himself with our experience, takes on a whimsical humanity, and thus becomes more marvelous. The elephant in the Zoo is an exhibit; the elephant tangoing in the tanbark ring is poetry.

And there is Zipp, the What-is-it? most venerable of freaks, whose browless tufted head and amazing figure have entertained his visitors since Phineas Taylor Barnum engaged him to ornament his museum on Ann Street. For all I know, Zipp is a poet — his smile is lyrical, and in his roving eyes there is a suggestion of vers libre. But at any rate, Zipp is a poem — a particularly charming poem when, in the procession of freaks which opens the performance, he gallantly leads round the arena that fantastically microcephalous young woman known to fame as the Aztec Queen. The Bearded Lady and the Snake Charmer and the Sword Swallower are poems — poems in the later manner of Thomas Hardy. And that delightfully diminutive choc-

olate-colored person who rejoices in the name of the Princess Wee-Wee — with her, in her dainty little golden-spangled gown, what lyric of Walter Savage Landor can compare?

It is the splendor of incongruity that gives the equestrian and aerial feats of the arena their charm, that incongruity which is the soul of romance. The creatures we see are the creatures we know, but they have most poetically changed places. It would be the mere prose of our daily life for birds to fly about close to the tent's roof, and for men and women to ring bells and sit in rocking chairs. It is the poetry of the circus that men and women fly about close to the tent's roof, and birds ring bells and sit in rocking chairs.

No one can describe a circus in prose. The industrious press agents of the circus long ago gave up the attempt, and resorted to impressionistic free verse, characterized by an ecstasy of alliteration. No one can adequately describe the involved contortions, swings, and dashes of a "family" of silk-clad adventurers on the flying trapeze. No faithful narrative of the grotesque buffetings of the chalk-faced clowns is in itself amusing — and yet the antics of these agile mimes have always been, will always be, irresistibly mirth-compelling. The magic of the circus is compounded of so many things — movement, sound, light, color, odor — that it can never be put into words. It is absurd to attempt to reflect it in prose, and it cannot be reflected in

poetry because it is itself poetry; it is the greatest poem in the world.

And just as Sleary's Circus was the cup of poetry which benevolent fate held twice to the parched lips of young Thomas Gradgrind's soul, so is the circus of our day, with its regiment of clowns, its roller-skating bears and dancing elephants, its radiant men and women who pirouette on horseback and dart above our heads like swallows, a most wholesome and invigorating tonic for a weary and prosaic generation. We who every morning at the breakfast table read of war and desolation need to cheer our hearts with the burlesque battles of the clowns; we who ride in the subway need to exult when the charioteer, with streaming toga, guides his six white horses on their thunderous course; we whose eyes are daily on our ledgers and sales records need to lift them, if not to the stars, at least to the perilous wire on which a graceful pedestrian gayly flirts with death. We whose lives are prose may well be grateful for the circus, our annual draught of poetry; for the circus, the perennial, irresistible, incomparable, inevitable Renaissance of Wonder.

THE ABOLITION OF POETS

. . .

EVER since certain vivacious Frenchmen put on funny little red nightcaps and remarked "Ça ira!" the inevitability of a reform has been the chief article of its propaganda. The Socialist orator says: "Socialism is coming upon us with the speed of the whirlwind and the sureness of the dawn." Therefore he mounts a soap-box and passionately urges six small boys, the town drunkard and a policeman to accelerate the whirlwind and encourage the dawn in its commendable habit of punctuality. The suffragist tells us: "The Votes for Women movement, like a mighty ocean, will break down the barriers of prejudice and flood the country." Therefore, like a perverted Mrs. Partington, she runs out with her little broom to help the ocean along. And so, humbly following these illustrious precedents, I advocate the abolition of poets because poets are rapidly abolishing themselves.

For one thing, they have given up the uniform. In the old days it was easy to recognize them. They wore velvet jackets and sombreros, they let their hair hang over their shoulders, they were also, I believe, picturesquely ragged. When you saw M. Paul Verlaine in his great cloak, drinking absinthe at a table on the boulevard,

you recognized him as a poet. But when you see Mr. Clinton Scollard in his decorous cut-away drinking a milk shake in a drug store, how are you to guess his profession?

Of course, there are people who look like poets. When your literarily inclined maiden aunt from West Swansey, New Hampshire (by a sacred convention all maiden aunts are literarily inclined), visits New York, you take her to a restaurant which is supposed to be bohemian because it is near Washington Square. The macaroni is buoyantly elastic, the lettuce is wilted, the chicken tough, the wine a blend of acetic acid and aniline. But your aunt enjoys it, and she is vastly interested in the company.

She hunts for poets. "There!" she exclaims. "There is a poet! What is his name?" And she points to a romantic looking youth with a great mop of hair, a soft-collared flannel shirt, and a large black necktie.

You answer, wildly striving to keep your reputation for omniscience: "That? Why, that's Alfred Noyes." Or "That's James Whitcomb Riley." Or "That's Henry van Dyke." Your aunt is pleasantly thrilled, and she will entertain all West Swansey with the tale of this literary adventure. And you drown your lie in a beaker of acid claret.

As a matter of fact, who is this big-necktied, long-haired person? Perhaps he is a cabaret performer, and will presently give your aunt a novel insight into the habits of the literati by

rising to sing with a lamentable air of gayety, "Funiculi, Funicula." Perhaps he is one of those earnest young men who have for their alma mater the dear old Ferrer School. But in all probability he is merely an innocent bystander who endeavors in his dress to commemorate a visit to East Aurora.

The two great steps in the abolition of poets were the shearing of Mr. Richard Le Gallienne and the invention of East Aurora. When Mr. Le Gallienne's hair waved, a black and curly banner, before the literary legions of the world, then poets lived up to their traditional reputation; courageously they were picturesque. But when the fell scissors did their brutal work, then poets donned the garb of burgesses.

And then the more adventurous burgesses began to dress like poets. Mr. Hubbard began the manufacture of large black neckties, and the Village Atheists all over America put them on. Every one who had queer ideas about religion, economics, ethics or politics wore the necktie that had previously confined only lyric throats. Now when you see a man wearing two yards of black crepe in front of his collar, do not expect him to sing you a madrigal. It is probable that his decoration signifies merely that he is opposed to vaccination.

And when the poets took to wearing prosaic clothes, they took also to following prosaic occupations. Is there now living a man who does nothing but write verse? I doubt that the

most thorough explorer of contemporary letters could discover such an anachronism. Poets still write poetry, but the ancient art is no longer their chief excuse for existence. They come before the public in other and more commonplace guises.

Mr. T. A. Daly was until recently business manager of a weekly paper. Messrs. Bliss Carman, Richard Le Gallienne, Ford Madox Hueffer, Nicholas Vachell Lindsay, and eight thousand other poets write literary criticisms. Dr. Henry van Dyke preaches and is a diplomat. Mr. Rudyard Kipling preaches and is not a diplomat. All the poets have regular jobs. In the good old days it was different. Then Dr. Henry van Dyke, Mr. Tom Daly, and the rest of them would have done nothing all day and all night but write poetry and read it to each other as they sat and drank anisette or some other sweet, sticky cordial in a club named the Camembert Cheese, or something of the sort. They would have scorned editing anything less precious than *The Germ* or *The Yellow Book*. And as to writing book reviews — as well ask them to get married!

For a time Mr. Alfred Noyes kept the spirit of craft-integrity. He alone, among book reviewing, story writing, magazine editing versifiers, was solely a poet. But now even he has taken up a side line. First he delivered the Lowell lectures; then he became a university professor. Over his laurel wreath he has put a mortar-board.

But the departure of the poets from a strictly professional attitude toward life is only one side of the shield. The poets have become citizens; that is bad enough. But also the citizens have become poets. They do not call themselves poets, they merely write verse as casually as they write letters.

For one thing, the rhymed advertisement is more common now than ever before. Formerly, when the proprietor or advertising manager of a manufactory of automobiles or chewing gum or some other necessity of American life desired to celebrate his wares in verse, he went to some trouble and expense. He called in an impecunious literary man, that is, a literary man, and with some trepidation made what business men quaintly call a proposition. The poet considered the matter carefully, arranged the terms of payment, and insisted upon the exclusion of his name from the published composition, was supplied with material descriptive of his subject, and departed to his conventional garret. In the course of time he brought back the desired verses, was paid, and treated with mingled curiosity and awe by the men of affairs who had made use of his talents.

Now all is changed. The advertising managers started scabbing on the unorganized and individualistic poets and actually drove them off the job. Now, when a cough drop is to be made the subject of a sonnet-sequence what happens? Does a regular professional poet get

a dollar a line for the work? He does not. The advertising manager sends the office boy out for a rhyming dictionary and writes the verses himself. Or else he lets the office boy write them.

But this is only one manifestation of this lamentable state of affairs. Another is the fact that most people are the authors of books of verse. People do not buy poetry, they do not read poetry, but they write it with amazing enthusiasm and industry. There are now at least four prosperous publishers who do nothing but bring out books at the expense of the authors, and their lists contain practically nothing but volumes of verse. The country clergyman, lawyer, or school teacher who has not written a volume of verse and paid from \$100 to \$500 to have it printed (with his portrait as frontispiece) is a rare bird indeed. These people never buy books of verse, and, of course, almost no copies of their own books are sold. But the fact remains that nearly everybody who can read and write makes verse, carelessly, casually, without effort or emotion. The shoemaker who wishes to call the attention of the public to his new stock of canvas shoes with green leather inserts lisps in numbers and the numbers come. And the man who has nothing to advertise but his own personality seizes authoritatively upon the Muse's hair and pulls it until she shrieks his praise.

It will be objected that what these people write is merely verse, not poetry; that no one considers them poets and that they do not claim

the title. But this is not a valid objection, it is thoroughly in accordance with my thesis. They write verse, and they are not poets; therefore they — all people, that is — believe that one need not be a professional poet to write verse any more than one need be a professional dishwasher to wash dishes. So poetry, as a distinct craft, utterly disappears, it does not even continue as a separate and special branch of unskilled labor.

Of course, there still exist people who take the making of verse somewhat seriously. But the loudest of them, those who most earnestly insist upon the importance of themselves and their art, are those ridiculous young people who call themselves Imagistes and Vorticists and similar queer names. And they deliberately take from poetry its characteristics of rhyme and rhythm and apply the name poetry to little chunks of maudlin prose. So they, too, are working for the abolition of poets and poetry.

There is an exquisite Socialist doctrine called "progressive poverty" or something of the sort, according to which we are to let conditions get worse and worse so that they may ultimately become unbearable. Then, it is said, the co-operative commonwealth will almost automatically come into being. Perhaps this suggests a solution for the problem now under consideration. Let the few remaining professional poets resolutely abstain from writing verse; let verse be made only by patent medicine manufacturers

and grocers and Imagistes and, in general, people totally ignorant of poetry. They will produce it in abundance; they will probably perfect some mechanical device, a poem-jenny, perhaps, which will produce a standard poem in a short time and gradually do away with the home-manufactured article.

In the course of time the patents on this device will be taken over by the Standard Oil Company, and poems of uniform perfection will be furnished at small cost to every house or apartment. Then, after some twenty-five years, there will come a reaction, a sort of craftsman, back-to-nature movement. Some adventurous person will make up a real poem of his own, and his friends will say, "How quaint! That is the way they did in the old days before the poem-jenny was invented. I rather like this poem. It has strength, simplicity, a primitive quality that I cannot find in the poems the Standard Oil Company sends us every week. Go on, Rollo, and see if you can make another one."

Thus encouraged, Rollo will make another poem, and another, and rather histrionically will assume the picturesque old title of poet. Other poets will arise, and the Standard Oil Company will turn its attention to perfecting devices for the construction of novels. Poems made by hand by specialists will then be the only articles of the sort produced. In this way only can there ever be a genuine renaissance of the ancient and honorable craft of poetry.

NOON-HOUR ADVENTURING

. . .

SUN worship, according to the latest religious census, is no longer a popular cult. This is a pity, for it was more respectable and more diverting than most of the forms of paganism that have superseded it.

But the sun is a good-humored deity; he showered his gifts no more generously of old on Teheran, whose walls were resonant with his praise, than now on faithless New York. Daily from his meridian he stretches forth his shining scimitar and strikes the fetters from the feet of young men, setting them free to walk the golden streets of an enchanted city.

The feet, I said, of young men. For men no longer young the noon hour is a time for the comfortable but unromantic occupation of eating. The man who usually takes a car to get from Thirty-third Street to Times Square, who occasionally lets the barber rub tonic on the top of his head, who carries blocks and dolls home on Saturday, who is morbidly interested in building loans and grass-seed, regards the noon hour as at worst a time for shopping and at best a time for eating. But to the young man, particularly to the young man for the first time

a wage-earner in the city, the noon hour is a time for splendid adventuring.

It may be that there are young women for whom the luncheon hour is a gay thread of romance in the dull fabric of the working day. Of this I cannot speak with certainty; my observation indicates that they regard it merely as an opportunity to go, in chattering companies, to those melancholy retreats called tea rooms to amuse themselves with gossip and extraordinary ices. But the young man leaves his desk at the appointed hour as bravely as ever pirate vessel left its wharf, and sails forth to sparkling and uncharted seas.

Consider, for example, the case of James Jones. James spent his boyhood in a town less than a hundred miles from New York. Visits to the city were great events in his young life. He was taken there to buy clothing, to go to the theatre, to visit unusually exciting relatives who lived in apartment houses, rode on elevators, and drew milk from dumb-waiters. During his collegiate career James made occasional trips to New York, always with the theatre and the tavern as his objectives. Triumphantly now he feels himself actually a New Yorker, a dweller in no mean city. Joyfully, therefore, he goes forth every noon to explore the territory of his new possession.

James is, let it be understood, nearer 20 than 25. He is beginning to regard his diploma with some disrespect, but he still wears his fraternity

pin on an obscure corner of his waistcoat. Every Saturday morning he gets an envelope containing a \$10 bill and a \$5 bill, and he has already formulated in his mind an eloquent appeal which cannot fail, he believes, to increase that amount to \$18.50. James endeavors to seem as sophisticated as the chauffeur of a taxicab; not for worlds would he betray the innocent delight with which he regards the city of his habitation.

With James' occupation from 9 in the morning until the luncheon hour we have no concern. Perhaps he sits on a high stool and ciphers in a great ledger, perhaps he haltingly dictates letters to a patronizing stenographer, perhaps he urges certain necessities or luxuries upon a suspicious public. The important fact of his life — for us and, in a measure, for him — is that once every day he answers the welcome summons of the unknown.

Luncheon is a tiresome obligation, quickly to be fulfilled. His mother would be vexed to see him gulp his malted milk or bolt his sandwich. On some occasions, with a pleasant sense of recklessness, he enters a bar, and, with something of a flourish, consumes beer and free lunch. With some difficulty he refrains from looking over the swinging doors before leaving, as he did in his home town, to make sure that none of his neighbors are coming down the street.

James left his desk only six minutes ago and his luncheon is already over. There remain fifty-four precious minutes. Behold him tasting

rapturously every second of these minutes! Behind a cheap but decorative cigar he walks up, perhaps, Fifth Avenue, undeniably that excellent thoroughfare's possessor. For his delight is Diana poised on her tower of purple memories; the grass of Madison Square is greener than that of his father's lawn; tulips more vivid than these never bloomed in the rich gardens of Holland.

He is considered a sympathetic person, but at noon, I fear, his attitude is that of a realist. For he watches with ingenuous interest the antics of that drunkard on a park bench, and regards the arrival of the patrol wagon and summary removal of the culprit as a drama got up solely for his entertainment. Regrettable as it may seem, it is with heightened spirits that he continues his stroll.

Now he has reached a great bookshop which even the penniless find hospitable. "Some day," says James to himself, "two hundred copies of my novel will draw a crowd around this plate glass window." Mentally he arranges an effective window display and goes on to feast his eyes on vellum and shagreen, on calf delicately tooled and parchment gay with gold leaf and many colored inks. Sometimes he enters the shop (the clerks are indulgent to James and his kind) and, over the merry pages of *Jugend* and *La Vie Parisienne*, rejoices that his father made him study modern languages at college.

But literature must not claim too much of his

fast-fleeting hour. There are shops at hand whose windows show things stranger than books; chairs and bedsteads eloquent of the genius of Adam and Heppelwhite; the massive silver platter on which old Wardle carved a Christmas goose when Mr. Pickwick was his guest; a mighty flagon that brimmed with red wine for Pantagruel; a carved jade bracelet from the brown arm of the Princess Badoura; the sword of Robert Bruce. All lands, all ages have sent their treasures to New York this noon for the entertainment of James Jones.

It may be that this square of Japanese embroidery, on which fantastic knights thrust tremendous javelins at red and green dragons under astonished willows, was made in Paterson, N.J. What of that? The colors are not therefore less bright. James is not a purchaser, he is merely a spectator of the greatest raree show in the world. It is well for him to be deceived in the splendors displayed before him. Not so many years ago he would prefer a red glass ball to the Kohinoor and a hand organ with a monkey to a piano with Paderewski. James yet retains a receptivity almost infantile; but it would pain him to be told so.

They are not gregarious, at noon, these young discoverers of New York. They are selfish in their adventuring, for a vision shared is only half a vision. James, I know, is annoyed when he finds an acquaintance gobbling a sandwich at his luncheon counter or staring in a jeweler's

window that he has come to regard as his own private property. On Sundays he is sociable enough; he is glad of a companion on his journeys across and up and down Manhattan, among the Italians and negroes of the upper west side, through the loud ghetto and speciously weird Chinatown, in the deliberate sylvaninity of Central Park and the Bronx Gardens. In the evening, too, he is not at all a recluse. But at noon he has no appetite for conversation, he would not have his attention taken from the strange streets by an accustomed human being.

James has never ridden on a London bus, yet I believe in the truth of his unspoken thought, that a Fifth Avenue bus is the most excellent vehicle in the world. The London bus depends for its charm on a number of non-essential qualities; on the humor of its driver (are the chauffeurs of London's electric buses also masters of epigram?), on the quaintness and antiquity of the thoroughfare, on the military efficiency of the traffic policemen, on the philmayishness of the passengers. The Fifth Avenue bus has one reason for existence: it shows its passengers Fifth Avenue. No bus can do more.

So one may (if one is young enough to be so foolish and so wise) ride, like the Gaikwar of Baroda in his swaying howdah, high above the people for a golden hour. He may start at uneasy Washington Square, where ancient respectability wars with young bohemianism. Soon he looks down on the throngs of new Americans

that tramp the once proud pavement. From his high seat he sees them, the small, dark men and women who, like him, are for a time released from labor. They move slowly in great crowds, they eat frugal meals, the wares of curb-side peddlers, they talk and gesture incessantly. What does James think of them? I do not believe that his opinion is worth knowing.

But he enjoys, I know, the tour through the traffic-filled intersection of Broadway and Twenty-third Street, and he is not old enough to notice with regret the gradual deterioration of the latter street. Freed from the close company of baser vehicles, how triumphantly the bus whirrs up the broad street past the square, among the splendid shops and clubs and churches — the true New Yorker, I think, names them in this order. But James must not give too much attention to the lovely Gothic lines of St. Thomas's, or the lovely Byzantine lines of that pink chiffon lady in the landau — the luncheon hour draws to a close, and punctuality, he still believes, is a business virtue.

The brevity of this recess is essential to it. If the time be indefinitely increased, if the young adventurer be allowed all the morning and all the afternoon for his wandering, then all the zest goes out of the adventure. There is that trusted veteran employee in the corner of the office. He receives fabulous sums on pay day and may go out to luncheon whenever he desires, with no time clerk to censor him. He knows

New York less than does James. But does his curiosity urge him forth to long adventures? Over his stale morning's paper in the deserted office, seated before his familiar task, he eats his sordid and wife-made luncheon!

But the noon adventurer is not limited to Fifth Avenue. The antique shops of Fourth Avenue charm him with pewter and brass, they cheer his heart with sun dials from English rose gardens and crucifixes from convents of Dante's land and time. At Twenty-third Street stalls he reads bits of forgotten writings and breathes the pleasant scent of worn calfskin. Perhaps on the 15-cent rack he comes upon a prize. Here is a little book of English verse by a Japanese poet. What is this faded inscription? "To Mary McLane from Yone Noguchi." The adventurer buys it, as the late Mr. Morgan would buy a Nuremburg Bible, and salves his economical conscience by rolling his own cigarettes for a while.

There are great sights for him, now and then. People who seemed, not so long ago, as legendary as Cuchulain and Cinderella appear to him on these noon expeditions, most startlingly human and real. He sees Mr. Roosevelt leave the Charities Building to enter a waiting taxicab. He visits the bootblack and in the chair next to him sits Mr. Bliss Carman, crowned with the huge black hat that is the livery of Vagabondia. On Fourteenth Street a big black-haired man and a little spectacled woman stop to laugh at

30 NOON-HOUR ADVENTURING

the fortune-telling paroquets. With a delicious thrill the adventurer recognizes Mr. Ben Reitman and Miss Emma Goldman.

Nor are his adventures confined to seeing. There is plenty of action, sometimes. Once, as he stared into the windows of an Oriental rug shop, he was aware of a thin, hunted-looking man who demanded his attention.

"I beg your pardon, Sir," said the hunted-looking man, "but can you tell me where I can find a parnbroker?"

I do not know why the hunted-looking man said "parnbroker," instead of "pawnbroker," but James always tells the story this way.

"No," said James, truthfully, "I can't."

"The reason I wanna know is," said the hunted-looking man very rapidly, "I gotta very fine stone here. I got into a little trouble in a hotel uptown; I gotta sell it right away very cheap."

And from a dirty pasteboard box he drew what seemed to be a large diamond ring.

Now was the thoroughly interested James aware of yet another stranger who sought his attention, a prosperous-looking man, who smoked a fat cigar and flourished a silver-headed stick, who seemed trying to caution James against buying the diamond.

James had only 35 cents in his pocket, and was not a buyer, but a spectator of jewelry anyway. The hunted-looking man withdrew slowly. Then said the prosperous-looking man to James:

"Excuse me for buttin' in, old man, but I didn't want to see you stung. Sometimes these here fellers got real stones, sometimes they got fakes. Now I'm a professional jeweler and I got my microscope that I look at diamonds with in my pocket. Now, you call that guy back and tell him I'm a friend of yours and I'll examine that stone and tell you if it's any good."

The hunted-looking man gave rather too dramatic a start of surprise when called back by the suspicious but curious James.

"It's worth \$500," he said, "but I'll sell it for \$50. I got into a little trouble at a hotel uptown, and I gotta sell it cheap."

Professionally, elaborately, impressively, the prosperous-looking man screwed a glass into his eye and squinted at the stone. Then, taking James several yards away from the hunted-looking man, he said: "That's a genuine stone worth easy \$500 if it's worth a cent. I know a place they'll give us \$500 for it this afternoon on account of me being in the trade. Now, you keep him here while I go round the corner and get \$25 from my bank and then we'll buy that stone together and make \$225 apiece before two hours is gone. I'll be right back."

And the prosperous-looking man vanished.

Then — as might have been expected — the hunted-looking man offered James the diamond for \$25. "You can put one over on that big guy," he said. "Slip me \$25 and we beat it before he gets back. You can clean up \$450 on

it. I'm afraid of that big guy; I think he's gone after a cop."

Now, these two confidence men had worked hard with James. He should not have taken such delight in their discomfiture as he climbed the steps of a bus and bade them farewell.

When he met the hunted-looking man and the prosperous-looking man together on Broadway a few days later they cut him, and I do not blame them. But they gave him a real adventure, at any rate, an adventure not to be met by those who squander their noon hour sitting dully in sedate restaurants.

Then there was the adventure of the picture gallery. James went on one occasion to a futurist exhibition in a tiny room not far from Madison Square. Galleries are not crowded at noon, but from the room that James approached came sounds not to be accounted for even by the crazy canvases on its walls. Of course James went in, and found a futurist painter wrestling with the agent of a collection agency. The combatants rose, and demanded James' name and address, that he might be summoned to court as a witness to assault and battery. But he never received either summons. Perhaps it was because he gave his name as Henry Smith of Yonkers.

Episodes like these have little charm for the middle-aged or for young men prematurely aged by spending their childhood in New York. These have their compensations, no doubt; their lives are not utterly bleak. But not for

them is the daily romance of the young man who has just come to the city, who enjoys the proud novelty of working for wage, to whom every noon come sweet and strange the streets' compelling voices.

SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

. . .

THOSE people whom an hostile fate has made both aesthetes and reformers have among their aversions one which they proclaim with an enthusiasm so intense to as be almost infectious. They dislike passionately the harmless, unnecessary sign board when it has been so placed as to become a feature of the rural landscape. Wooden cows silhouetted against the sunset only irritate them by their gentle celebrations of malted milk; the friendliest invitation to enjoy a cigarette, a corset or a digestive tablet fills them with anger if it comes from the face of a sea-shadowing cliff or from among the ancient hemlocks of a lofty mountain.

There is, of course, a modicum of reason in their attitude. It is wrong to paint the lily at all; it is doubly wrong to paint "Wear Rainproof Socks" across its virgin petals. It is wrong to mar beauty; that is an axiom of all aesthetics and of all ethics. It would be wrong, for example, (although it would be highly amusing), to throw by means of a magic lantern great colored phrases against Niagara's sheet of foam; it would be wrong to carve (as many earnest readers of our magazines believe has been done) an insurance company's advertisement on the Rock of Gibraltar.

But the aesthete-reformer, in condemning such monstrosities as these, condemns merely an hypothesis. And since the hypothesis obviously is condemnable, he starts a crusade against the innocent facts upon which the purely hypothetical evil is based. It is wrong to mar the snowy splendor of the Alps; therefore, he says, the Jersey meadows must not bear upon their damp bosom the jubilant banner of an effective safety-razor. The sylyan fastnesses of our continent must be saved from the vandal; therefore, he says, you may not advertise breakfast food on a hoarding in the suburbs of Paterson.

If the aesthete-reformers in question would examine the subject dispassionately they would see that there is really nothing in the sign board as it stands today about which they may justly complain. Advertisers do not deliberately annoy the public; they would not be so foolish as to seek to attract people by spoiling what was beautiful. It must be remembered that a landscape may be rustic and yet not beautiful.

The aesthete does not dislike, indeed he hails with enthusiasm, a worn stone bearing the dim inscription "18 Mil. To Ye Cittye of London." Why then should he shudder when he sees a bright placard which shouts "18 Miles to the White Way Shoe Bazaar, Paterson's Pride"? To my mind there is a vivacity and a humanness about the second announcement utterly lacking in the first. The aesthete dotes upon the swinging boards which with crude paintings announce

the presence of British inns. If "The Purple Cow, by Geoffrey Pump. Entertainment for Man and Beast" delights his soul, why does he turn in angry sorrow from "Stop at the New Mammoth Hotel when you are in Omaha—500 Rooms and Baths—\$1.50 up—All Fire-proof"? It is a cheerful invitation, and it should bring to jaded travelers through the track-pierced wastes a comfortable sense of approaching welcome and companionship.

There are many things which might be said in favor of urban sign boards, especially in favor of those elaborate arrangements in colored lights which make advertisements of table waters and dress fabrics as alluringly lovely as the electrical splendor of the first act of Dukas' "*Ariane et Barbe Bleu*." But in the city the sign board is always something supererogatory; it may be decorative, but it is not necessary. One does not need a six-yard announcement of a beer's merit when there are three saloons across the street; even the placards of plays line almost uselessly the thoroughfares of a district in which the theatres are conspicuous.

But in the country the sign boards are no luxuries but stern necessities. This the aesthete-reformers fail to see because they lack a sense of the unfitness of things. It is their incongruity which gives to rustic sign boards the magic of romance. The deliberately commercial announcement, firmly set in an innocent meadow or among the eternal hills, has exactly the same

charm as a buttercup in a city street or a grey wood-dove fluttering among the stern eaves of an apartment house.

What a benefaction to humanity these rural sign boards are! To the farmer they are (in addition to being a source of revenue) a piquant suggestion of the wise and wealthy city. He loves and fears the city, as mankind always loves and fears the unknown. Once he thought that it was paved with gold. He must have thought so, otherwise how could he have accounted for the existence of gold bricks? He is less credulous now, but still the big signs down where the track cuts across the old pasture pleasantly thrill his fancy.

And what would a railway journey be without these gay and civilizing reminders? They hide the shame of black and suicidal bogs with cheery hints of vaudeville beyond, they throw before the privacy of farmhouses a decent veil of cigarette advertisements. He who speeds vacationward from the city is glad of them, for they remind him that he is where factories and huge shops may come only in this pictured guise, thin painted ghosts of their noisy selves. He who gladly speeds back to domesticity and the ordered comforts of metropolitan life sees them as welcoming seneschals, glorious advance-posts of civilization. They are the least commercial of all commercial things, they are as human and as delightful as explorers or valentines.

THE GREAT NICKEL ADVENTURE

. . .

WHENEVER I read Mr. Chester Firkins' excellent poem "On a Subway Express" I am filled with amazement. It is not strange that Mr. Firkins turned the subway into poetry, it is strange that the subway does not turn every one of its passengers into a poet.

There are, it is true, more comfortable means of locomotion than the subway; there are conveyances less crowded, better ventilated, cooler in Summer, warmer in Winter. A little discomfort, however, is an appropriate accompaniment of adventure. And subway-riding is a splendid adventure, a radiant bit of romance set in the gray fabric of the work-a-day world.

The aeroplane has been celebrated so enthusiastically in the course of its brief life that it must by now be a most offensively conceited machine. Yet an aeroplane ride, however picturesque and dangerous, has about it far less of essential romance than a ride in the subway. He who sails through the sky directs, so nearly as is possible, his course, he handles levers, steers, goes up or down, to the left or the right. Or if he is a passenger, he has, at any rate, full knowledge of what is going on around him, he

sees his course before him, he can call out to the man at the helm: "Look out for that comet's hair! Turn to the left or the point of that star will puncture our sail!"

Now, unseen dangers are more thrilling than those seen; the aeroplane journey has about it inevitably something prosaic. This is the great charm of the subway, that the passengers, the guards, too, for that matter, give themselves up to adventure with a blind and beautiful recklessness. They leave the accustomed sunlight and plunge into subterranean caverns, into a region far more mysterious than the candid air, into a region which since mankind was young has been associated with death. Before an awed and admiring crowd, the circus acrobat is shut into a hollow ball and catapulted across the ring; with not even a sense of his own bravado, the subway passenger is shut into a box and shot twenty miles through the earth.

Once there lived on West One Hundred and Eighty-second Street a man of uncompromising practicality, a stern rationalist. He was as advanced as anything! He believed in the materialistic interpretation of history, economic determinism, and radium; this, he said, with some pride, was his Creed. Often he expressed his loathing for "flesh-food," more frequently for "Middle Class morality," most frequently for faith. "Faith is stupidity," he would say. "Look before you leap! It makes me sick to see the way people have been humbugged in all ages.

40 THE GREAT NICKEL ADVENTURE

The capitalist class has told them something was true, something nobody could understand, and they've blindly accepted it, the idiots! I believe in what I see — I don't take chances. I don't trust anybody but myself."

Yet every day this man would give himself up to the subway with a sweet and child-like faith. As he sat in the speeding car, he could not see his way, he had no chance of directing it. He trusted that the train would keep to its route, that it would stop at Fourteenth Street and let him off. He could not keep it from taking him under the river and hurling him out into some strange Brooklyn desert. When he started for home in the evening, he read the words "Dyckman Street" on the car window with a mediaeval simplicity, and on the guarantee of these printed words, placed there by minions of the capitalist class, he gave up the privilege of directing his course. The train, he believed, would not at Ninety-sixth Street be switched off to a Bronx track, the sign told him that he was safe, and he believed it.

So the subway caused him to exercise the virtue of faith, made him, for a time, really a human being. Perhaps it is the sharing of this faith that makes a subway crowd so democratic. Surely there is some subtly powerful influence at work, changing men and women as soon as they take their seats, or straps.

For one thing, they become alike in appearance. The glare of the electric light unifies them,

modifying swarthy faces and faces delicately rouged until they are nearly of one hue. Then, the differences of attitude are lost, and attitudes are great instruments of subordination. The ragged bootblack does not kneel at the broker's feet, he sits close beside him, or perhaps, comfortably at rest, watches the broker clutch a strap and struggle to keep his footing.

"Tired clerks, pale girls, street-cleaners, business men, boys, priests and sailors, drunkards, students, thieves" — all gain a new sincerity. Neither the millionaire's imperiousness nor the beggar's professional humility can make the train go faster, so both are laid aside. Distinctions of race and caste grow insignificant, as in a company confronting one peril or one God. This is not theory, it is fact. The subway passenger purchases a nickel's worth of speed and he must take with it a nickel's worth of democracy.

Perhaps it is the youthful romanticism of America which makes our subways so much more exciting than those of Europe. The Englishman is too cautious and too conservative to trust himself away from the earth's surface more than two minutes at a time. So the trains that run through the London tube are tame, cowardly things. They timidly run underground for half a mile or so and pop their heads out into the air and sunlight or fog at every station.

But the New York subway train is ready to take a chance. It dives into the earth and "stays under," like a brave diver, for an hour at

a time. And when it does emerge, what splendor attends its coming! There is a glimmer of sunshine at the One Hundred and Sixteenth Street Station; the blue and white of the walls and pillars reflect a light not wholly artificial. Then there is a brief stretch of fantastically broken darkness. Passengers in the first car can see ahead of them, at Manhattan Street, a great door of sunshine. At last there is a strange change in the rumble of the wheels, for the echoing roof and walls are gone, and the train leaves its tunnel not to run humbly over the ground, but to rise higher and higher until it comes to a sudden halt above the chimneys and tree tops. To say that the grub becomes a butterfly does not fit the case, for the grub is a slow-moving beast and a butterfly's course is capricious. Rather, it is as if, by some tremendous magic, a great snake became a soaring eagle.

And how keenly all the passengers enjoy their few seconds in the open air! When they hurried down the steps to the train, they were scornful of the atmosphere they were leaving, they had no thought of tasting wind and watching sunlight. Now they are become, for the moment, connoisseurs of these delectable things; they wish the train would linger at Manhattan Street, not inevitably plunge at once into its roaring cavern. But the train is wise, it knows brevity is essential to all exquisite things, so it gives its passengers only an evanescent glimpse of the glories they have just now learned to appreciate.

This is a part of the great conspiracy of the subway. It is regarded only as a swift and convenient and uncomfortable carrier, and it has no wish to be otherwise interpreted. But those who have studied it know the hidden purposes it constantly and effectively serves. It is showing our generation the value of mankind's commonest and most precious gifts, by taking them away.

Now, it is good for man or beast to stand on solid ground in the sunlight, breathing clean air. Also fellowship is good, and the talk of friends. We forgot the value of these, we shut ourselves up in dark rooms and we spared no time to social exercise. Then — to punish and cure our folly — came the subway, making our journeys things close and dark in which conversation is a matter of desperate effort. And now how kind and talkative are people who go home together from the subway station after their daily disciplinary ride! They are grateful, too — although it may be subconsciously — for the familiar sights and sounds of the earth, for houses and streets and light that does not come from a wire in a bottle. They take gladly the great common things; they are simple, natural, democratic.

So they spend much of their leisure out of doors, these men and women who are underground two hours every weekday. In the evenings and on Sunday afternoons, they walk the pleasant streets with eager delight. They are curious about the loveliness far beneath which they daily

44 THE GREAT NICKEL ADVENTURE

speed. They have learned something of the art of life.

Of course, the subway has its incidental charms — its gay fresco of advertisements, for instance, and its faint mysterious thunder when it runs near the surface of the street on which we stand. But its chief service to man — perhaps its reason for existence — is that it gives him adventure. In this adventure he meets the spirit of faith and the spirit of democracy, which is an aspect of charity. And by their influence he becomes, surely though but for a time, as a little child.

THE URBAN CHANTICLEER

. . .

IF the rooster selected tree-tops for his roosting, crowed mournfully at the moon, and were a wild, unfriendly bird, every man's hand would be against him. But we forgive him his ugliness and conceit, not only because he is a dutiful citizen of the barnyard, but also because now, as in the days of the noble Horatio, he obligingly acts as "trumpet to the morn." On account of this romantic and sometimes useful custom, he wears a sentimental halo. M. Rostand has made him the hero of a drama. When will some wise playwright celebrate his urban prototype, the alarm clock?

The spirit in which this question is asked is not wholly one of mockery. For the alarm clock is close to humanity; in the city household, few bits of furniture are more personal and necessary. It is a faithful servant, this loud-voiced creature of steel and glass, obedient, punctual, patient. And its association with its owner, I had almost written its master, is so peculiarly intimate as to give it a personality and an attitude toward life.

In the first place, it is irresistibly egotistic. There are some usual possessions which become subconscious things, their identities merging with the shadows of the vague land of habit. One

may, for instance, possess a watch and yet not be aware of the watch as he is aware of his alarm clock. He lifts it from and returns it to his pocket, he winds it, with a gesture almost involuntary; he takes his information from his dial as thoughtlessly as he takes his breath from the atmosphere. Though it be made of fine gold, cunningly chased and blazoned with precious stones, it is to him, after the first delight of its acquisition, the unregarded means to an important end. So long as it serves him unprotestingly, he thinks of it no more than of his soul. People do not specifically ask him to consult his watch, they ask, "What time is it?" and even "Have you the time?"

Not thus does an alarm clock sink into oblivion. At least twice in twenty-four hours its owner must be vividly aware of its existence. It imperiously demands of him conscious action. In the morning clangorously, at night dumbly, it insists on attention. He must with thought adjust its mechanism, he must give it intelligent orders. And whether he rises at its summons or instead shuts out with a pillow its voice and that of conscience, he cannot ignore it. By no effort of will could Frankenstein forget his monster.

Not that the alarm clock is always a thing monstrous and threatening. It obeys orders with soldierly exactness but its sympathy is most unmartial. Routine cannot deaden its sensitivity. True, its ordinary note is something

dry and monotonous. This comes from its perfect sense of the fitness of things; the call to business should be business-like. But what triumphant peals burst from its tiny belfry when it bids you rise and put on robes of honor! It can mimic the proud mirth of wedding bells; it knows the mighty song that rang from all the towers of London to cheer Dick Whittington. And that it can utter harsh and strident grief, those know who lie down with Sorrow and must awaken with her.

Even the most materialistic man has for his alarm clock a shame-faced personal regard. He speaks of it deprecatingly, with a humorous show of indignation. He tells how he maltreated it, knocked it from the mantel, smothered it with blankets, and there is a note of almost paternal exultation in his voice when he describes its persistence in ringing.

Franker souls actually parade what may be termed their alarm-clockophilia. A friend of mine, one Carolus Dillingham, talks by the hour of his Nellie. Nellie is not, to the casual observer, an alarm clock of extraordinary merit. She was constructed many years ago and her nickel-plating is nearly gone. She is a small, weak-looking thing, with a great dome absolutely out of proportion to her rickety body. A result of her ridiculous construction is that when the alarm rings, she becomes slightly overbalanced, trembles, and moves a fraction of an inch forward on her feeble legs.

This, according to Carolus, is her chief charm. "I put Nellie," he says, "on the very edge of the shelf by the foot of my bed. When she rings in the morning she topples off and lands on the blankets. So I don't need to get up and walk across the cold floor. I can just reach out and choke her. I think she is the most faithful alarm clock in the world."

One little regarded virtue of the alarm clock is its sturdy democracy. It belongs irrevocably to the people, nothing can make it a snob. There is a watch for every rank; there are coarse peasant watches, fat bourgeois watches, and watches delicately aristocratic. But the alarm clock in the tenement of the laborer is the exact duplicate of that which wakens his employer; an alarm clock's an alarm clock for a' that. America will never really be a decadent nation until its alarm clocks are jeweled and soft-voiced.

The captious critic may object that the reason for the plainness of alarm clocks is that their use is restricted to what is loosely called "the working class." There is some truth in this.

Up to the present I have never witnessed the awaking of an aristocrat, or even of a captain of industry, but I suppose that they are hailed in soft tones by liveried menials, who bring them golden trays absolutely overflowing with breakfast food and remarkably thick cream. But aristocrats and captains of industry are rare birds, and all other people must have alarm clocks.

All other people, that is, who live in cities.

For the alarm clock, in spite of its numerous excellences, is as inappropriate in the country as rouge on a milkmaid. The farmer must try to live up to his craft, and one of his aesthetic duties is to depend on mechanism as little as possible. His wife should rise when she hears the poultry saluting the dawn. Then, so nearly as I remember her obligations, she should go out on the front porch and blow a conchshell until her husband wakes up.

The dweller in the suburbs is a creature of compromise. He grows vegetables and keeps chickens, perhaps he grows vegetables for the use of the chickens, and he cultivates a rural manner of speech. But he spends most of his waking hours in the city and every night he brings out with him on the five-twenty-seven some device to alter the simplicity of the country. He is an ambiguous creature, analogous to the merman. And the conspicuous symbol of his ambiguity is his alarm clock. It is in ruralia but not of it. It stands by a window that opens on an orchard, but it indicates the factory and market-place. It is a link between its owner's two personalities, it is the skeleton at the feast, reminding him, when he comes in from weeding the strawberry patch, that he must get up at a quarter to seven the next morning and hurry to the noisy train. Never does an alarm clock look so blatantly mechanical as when it stands in a cottage of one of the people barbarously termed "commuters."

For in the city, where everything is mechanical, the alarm clock seems pleasantly personal. It is at home there, it is perfectly in keeping with its surroundings. It takes on as comfortable an air of domesticity as the most ornate Swiss timepiece that ever said "Cuckoo," it is contented, sociable, a member of the family. There is a sense of strangeness in the apartment that has no alarm clock; it is like a catless fireside.

And by association with the other sounds of awaking life, which even in the most sordid slum have about them something of energy and hope, the morning chorus of alarm clocks, echoing down the paved canyons from six to eight, make, in the ears of the unprejudiced listener, a cheerful noise. With them comes the mysterious creaking of the dumb-waiter as it ascends with the milk, an adequate substitute for the lowing of the herd. Kitchens and kitchenettes take on new life, and issue grateful odors of coffee and bacon. And babies, seeing that their weary parents are leaving them, decide at last that it is time to go to sleep.

An alarm clock can, on occasion, preach a sermon that would arouse the envy of Savonarola. When the jaded reveler returns to his home at daybreak, wastes ten minutes in a frantic attempt to awaken the elevator boy, and climbs, with cursing and gnashing of teeth, the eight flights of stairs that lead to his apartment, then nothing more sharply reminds him of his truancy than the voices of the alarm clocks calling to

each other in the bedrooms of his virtuous neighbors.

Not even the laziest or the weariest man can hate the alarm clock as he does the factory whistle. The shrill blast that comes every morning from the iron throat of this monster has in it a note of contemptuous menace. The tired laborers awaken at their master's bidding; there is something unnatural about this abrupt wholesale termination of sleep. But the discipline of the alarm clock is another matter; he who hears it listens, it may be said, to his own voice. He himself has set it, he has fixed the very moment of his own awaking. And there is dignity in observing rules self-imposed, however irksome they may be. The alarm clock is the symbol of civilization, that is, of voluntary submission, of free will obedience.

The careful reader will be aware that many aspects of this excellent device have been neglected in this brief consideration. I have said nothing of the alarm clock's sense of humor and of its willingness to become a party to practical jokes. I have said nothing of how it may be pleased, of its pride, for instance, in being referred to as an "alarum clock." But it has one characteristic which I must mention, its usefulness to the suddenly rich.

There is a delightful sort of novel, Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett wrote one, and so did Mr. H. G. Wells, which deals with the adventures of a young man who has unexpectedly inherited a

fortune. Samuel Warren's "Ten Thousand a Year" is perhaps the greatest example of this manner of fiction. Well, if I were T. Tembarom, or Kipps, or Tittlebat Titmouse (Dr. Warren's hero), my alarm clock would be necessary for my first act of celebration. Perhaps I should throw it from a window, perhaps I should remove its bell, perhaps I should merely enjoy letting it run down. At any rate, its presence would be necessary to the complete enjoyment of my new freedom.

DAILY TRAVELING

GIVE a dog a bad name and hang him. Call the custom of daily travel "commuting" and deliver it over to the whips of the scorner. The intransitive verb "to commute" is a barbarous thing, hé who is called "commuter" is thereby rudely and ungrammatically taunted with journeying at reduced rates, with being (terrible thought!) the recipient of a railway's charity.

It is lamentable that so picturesque a habit as daily railway travel should be thus misnamed. That it is a picturesque habit is perceived by any one who takes the trouble to consider it scientifically, shutting resolutely from his mind the odium brought upon it by its odious name. Suppose, for instance, that you were to go into the tap-room of the Mermaid Tavern some winter evening during the reign of the, so to speak, Good Queen Bess. The venerable Mr. Alfred Noyes would lead you to the table always reserved for Messrs. Shakespeare, Marlowe and Jonson. You would take from your pocket your commutation ticket, and, holding aloft that cabalistically inscribed oblong of colored cardboard, would sonorously declaim:

"By means of this talisman I daily fly across

leagues of the New World, from my cottage in a primeval forest to the heart of a mighty city. It enables me to lead two lives; I am on week-days urban, sophisticated, a man of commerce; at night and on Sundays I am a smocked yokel, innocent among my innocent vegetables. This little square of cardboard enables me to ride in a splendid vehicle, a vehicle propelled by Nature herself more swiftly than the wind, a vehicle which laughs at time and obliterates space. The masters of romance, bowing in homage, have bestowed upon me the mystic and awful name 'commuter.' "

Such a tale would draw Marlowe from his Malmsey and thrill the stout heart of mighty Ben. And Avon's bard, charmed by a fact more golden than all his imaginings, would augustly murmur "Very good, Eddie!"

It is a picturesque thing, this daily trip between the meadows and the pavements. By general consent, a vagabond is the most romantic of men; an allusion to the open road, wandering feet or the starlight on one's face is sufficient to turn an ordinary rhymers into that radiant being, a "tramp-poet." Then what glory must cling to those habitual vagabonds, those devotees of the steel highway, whom we call commuters. The common tramp seldom covers more than ten miles from sunrise to sundown, as a rule his pilgrimage is even briefer. Yet he is called a knight of the open road and even the staidest householder has a sneaking admiration for him.

The gypsy is no true vagabond, for he takes with him his wife, children, dogs, furniture, and even his canvas-roofed house. Yet our writers, from Borrow to Kipling, delight to urge us to ha' done with the tents of Shem, dear lass, and follow the Romany patteran. The only authentic vagabond is he who every day goes thirty miles from his rural home to the city and every night thirty miles back, diving through mountains, plunging under rivers; twice on every weekday, a wanderer more free and venturesome than Lavengro himself.

But its picturesqueness is not the sole recommendation of daily railway travel. The greatest of its numerous virtues is that it is democratic, the only absolutely democratic institution in the United States of America. It is the mighty leveler, the irresistible enemy of social subordination.

In a city, town or village in which the citizens remain night and day there can be no true democracy. The intentions of its inhabitants may be excellent, but circumstances will be stronger. There is the minister, there is the banker, there is the doctor, there is the grocer, there is the cobbler, there is the minister's hired man. If a New England rural community is under observation there will also be noted the village atheist, the village drunkard, and the village Democrat. The population is sharply divided into classes; there may be friendliness among the various grades of humanity, there

may be liberty, but there can be no fraternity, no equality.

How different is the community in which people merely dwell, having their business elsewhere! What is their occupation? They go to The City — that is sufficient answer to admit them to fellowship. If curiosity be still unsatisfied, there is the mention of the name of a great firm, and all is well.

The cobbler, you see, keeps his last in the city, away from his home and his neighbors; he does not stick to it, as the unpleasant adage bids him. As he sits on his red velvet chair, enjoying with his neighbors tobacco smoke, rapid travel, and the news of the world, who shall say whether he deals in shoes or in empires? Next to him is Dusenbury, who in addition to going to New York, goes to Wall Street, rumor has it. What does he do in Wall Street? Does he corner the wheat market or clean out waste baskets? Those who know, who say to him, "Sir" or "Hey, you," are not his companions on the 7.57.

There is a certain charm about what is called, ridiculously enough, a "commuting town," which is altogether lacking in other communities. A "commuting town" is wholly a place of homes — not of homes diluted with offices, factories and shops. It is therefore the quintessence of domesticity, being domestic with an intensity which no village which is remote from the centres of civilization, which furnishes employment and

supplies to its own citizens can hope to approach.

Such a town is daily divided and joined, diminished and completed, thereby keeping in a state of healthy activity. The 7.57 takes away, the 5.24 brings back. These recurrent separations and reunions are not without their ethical and emotional value.

INCONGRUOUS NEW YORK

THAT dislike of the obvious which is the chief characteristic of American humor is clearly exemplified in the names of most of New York's streets.

The dwellers in a great European city would give their proudest avenue of great shops and rich clubs some dignified and significant title, like the Rue de la Paix or the Friedrichstrasse. The Asiatics would give it a name more definitely descriptive and laudatory, like "The Street of the Thousand and One Mirrors of Delight." The New Yorkers, "laconic and Olympian," designate it by a simple numeral. They call it Fifth Avenue.

It comes partly from the national reticence, this prosaic name of a poetic thoroughfare. It is a manifestation of that attitude of mind which makes us to call a venerated and beloved statesman merely "Old Abe," when the English would call him "the Grand Old Man" and the Italians "the Star-crowned Patriarch." Also it is a phase of our democracy. We will not seem to exalt one avenue over another by giving it a fairer name; Fifth Avenue sounds to the uninitiated no more wealthy and aristocratic than Fourth Avenue. Indeed, if there be any par-

tiality in the awarding of names, it would seem to be exercised in favor of First Avenue or Avenue A.

It may be objected that the sponsors of Fifth Avenue did not foresee its destined splendor. But this fact does not alter the case; we continue to call it Fifth Avenue, whereas Europeans would alter its name to something more appropriate to its grandeur.

There was a pilgrim from the Five Towns who said that Fifth Avenue was architecturally the finest street in the world. This might pass for a guest's flattery, were it not that Mr. Arnold Bennett is of a nation which does not count gracious insincerity among its vices. New York must blushingly admit the truth of his judgment.

It is not (he said) harmonious. Its beauty is made up of units of beauty related only by position. This, too, is characteristically American. Each building must have its distinctive excellence.

To give a street of wonders an austere name, to build palaces and fill them with offices and shops — these are the acts by which Americans are known. And especially does the New Yorker delight in the whimsical, the inconsistent, the unexpected. He is like a child who likes to dig in the sand with a silver spoon and to eat porridge with a toy shovel.

And this delicate perversity has its refreshing aspect. Fifth Avenue, surely, is a thing to admire in the new sense as well as the old. It sometimes suggests, perhaps, the ill-natured

definition of a New Yorker as a man who, when he makes a set of chimes, puts it in a life insurance building. But it more often suggests a restatement of this definition; that is, that a New Yorker is a man who, when he makes a life insurance building, puts a set of chimes in it.

Now, certain masters of the mirthless science of psychology teach that humor depends on incongruity. Whether or not this is true, incongruity has much to do with making life worth while. For incongruity is the soul of romance.

Nobility, love, courage, beauty — the possession of these qualities does not give to a man or a woman romantic charm. A person is a hero or a heroine of romance because he or she lives in a contrasting place or age. For example, a cowboy riding a bucking bronco and whirling his lariat under a canvas roof in some sedate Eastern town is properly considered by the spectators to be a romantic figure. A cowboy engaged in the same interesting occupations on a Texas ranch would not be considered a romantic figure by his neighbors. It is incongruity of environment that romantically transforms him.

People and things of bygone ages are romantic to us because the years have gilded them. They were not romantic to their contemporaries. Says Edwin Arlington Robinson:

Miniver loved the Medici
And eyed a khaki suit with loathing;
He missed the mediaeval grace
Of iron clothing.

Exactly. Miniver Cheevy was a true romanticist. A plumed knight, armed cap-a-pie, is a romantic figure when we merely see him through the years from our modern surroundings by means of imagination's powerful lens; he would be a figure even more romantic if we could actually see him shake his lance and lead his warriors against a drab-suited, machine-like company of present-day soldiers. Why, even horse cars, commonplace enough in their day, take on a certain sentimental lustre when they lie abandoned in the outskirts of cities proud with electricity. And a subway train will one day be as romantic a spectacle as a stage coach.

Sometimes a building is deliberately given the romance of incongruity. This certainly is the case with the New York Stock Exchange. This splendid Grecian temple, with its lofty columns and noble façade, would, if it stood in ancient Athens, be, of course, beautiful, but in no respect romantic. It is romantic because it is in a place where it would not naturally be expected and because it is devoted to uses for which it does not seem to have been intended. If the god therein worshipped were not Mammon, but altisonant Jupiter, if white-robed priests found the future prefigured in the warm blood of the lambs therein sacrificed — then the building which now houses the clamoring merchants would be merely dignified and practical and not, as it is today, romantic.

The use of this Grecian temple as a counting

house is a splendid example of the poetic tendency of a popular mind. The common business terms — “Bull” and “Bear,” for example — are incongruous, and therefore romantic. And a successful business man is not realistically called a successful business man; he is romantically called a “merchant prince” or a “captain of industry.”

But most of New York’s romantic places get their glory not by plan, but by the accident of design. You turn the corner from a sombre street lined by tall concrete and steel structures that obviously are of your own period and come suddenly upon a mellow bit of New Amsterdam. You would not be surprised to see old Peter Stuyvesant stump down Coenties Slip and drop in for his morning’s Hollands at “22½,” across the way. There are streets and squares and alleys in downtown New York that look now exactly as they did when Times Square was a cow pasture and the Bowery really bowery. But these places were not romantic to the citizens of that time; they would not be romantic to us if by some strange backward transmigration of souls we should inhabit a vanished century.

No, we are fortunate to live when Battery Place and Coenties Slip have acquired romance’s glamour. Incongruity is the soul of romance. And these quaint time-hallowed places have the loveliest sort of incongruity — the magical incongruity of archaisms.

IN MEMORIAM: JOHN BUNNY

THERE was a clown named Joseph Grimaldi. And when his agile limbs and mobile features were stilled by death there lingered in the minds of the thousands who had laughed at him in Sadler's Wells and Covent Garden only the memory of their mirth.

There was a clown named John Bunny. Now he is dead. But we still may see, and our children's children may see, the gestures and grimaces that made him a welcome visitor in every quarter of the globe. For by grace of the motion-picture camera, John Bunny's art endures.

It is art, this power of conveying ideas without the use of words, of exciting laughter by actually being, instead of saying, a joke. It is the difficult and venerable art of the clown, the art of the shaven-headed mime in variegated robes whose antics drove care from Caesar's furrowed brow, the art of Garrick's harlequin friend, John Rich, and of the mirth-compelling Pinkethman, whose "frolic gestures" won the praise of Alexander Pope.

Of course, John Bunny could play in speaking parts. Before he found his real vocation, before the motion pictures claimed him as their great

comedian, he trod the boards of the "legitimate" stage, and with no small success. He ran the theatrical gamut from minstrelsy to Shakespeare. Annie Russell, Maude Adams, Weber and Fields — these are a few of the stars whose radiance he augmented during the first twenty-five years of his professional life. But today the regular drama offers little opportunity to the true clown, and it was not until he appeared on the screen that John Bunny reached his own public — that is, the world.

The word clown has fallen of late years into unmerited disrepute. Impressionistic critics of the drama attempt to disparage a comedian by calling him a "mere clown." They might as well call Mr. Sargent a "mere painter," or M. Rodin a "mere sculptor." What they mean is that the comedian of their discontent is not a clown at all. For the grotesquely clad men, with whitened, expressionless faces, who tumble about the circus ring, have no right to the exclusive possession of their title. Indeed, few of them are genuine clowns in the best sense of the word, for most of them cause laughter by obvious horseplay, not by the true clown methods of elaborate pantomime and striking facial contortions.

The greatest comedians have been the greatest clowns. Even the most brilliant lines, spoken most winningly, fail of their effect upon the audience unless the speaker has a clown's power to act with his features. And if a clown be great

enough he may safely dispense with words — as John Bunny did.

The English pantomime even in Thackeray's day had fallen from its once high place. The lovely Columbine remained and the sprightly Harlequin and the grotesque Pantaloon. But there were songs and dialogue, the entertainment was simply a sort of vaudeville, not genuine pantomime at all. It was not until the huge, clicking camera made lasting the gestures of the actors that the art of pantomime came back to its own.

There is a word used by men and women who have to do with this great branch of the world's amusement which deserve immortality. It is the verb "register." An actor registers grief, or amusement, or astonishment. That is, he assumes an expression which, when recorded by the camera and exhibited, will convey his emotion to the audience. In that one word there is a valuable treatise on the dramatic art. The inferior actor is content with expressing an emotion. The true actor registers it.

And what a sense of permanence is in that word "register!" Alfred de Musset and many another sentimental poet lamented the ephemeral nature of the actor's fame. The painter, it has been said, the writer and the sculptor, live in their works. But the actor's art perishes with him; when he dies, the memory of his expressive face and graceful form goes into the oblivion that keeps the echoes of his golden voice.

Well, we have changed all that. The number of people who lose their cares under the spell of John Bunny's magic today is greater than it was a year ago. The motion pictures have made the actor's chances for immortality equal with those of his fellows in the other arts.

Enemies of the motion picture (there really are such people) say that the humor of such entertainments is not true humor, but vulgar and barbarous horseplay, requiring no art. Any one, they say, can get a laugh, as Charlie Chaplin does, by being knocked down by an automobile or by being grossly fat, like John Bunny.

The adequate answer to a critic who makes such statements as these is "Go out in the street and get knocked down by an automobile." This may be the remark which actors (and sensitive producers) commonly feel like making to dramatic critics, but in this case it should have no tinge of bitterness. Go out in the street and get knocked down by an automobile. See if the people laugh at you as they laugh at Chaplin. They will laugh at you only if you are artist enough to be knocked down humorously — as Chaplin is knocked down.

And, as to John Bunny's success being due to his fatness, that criticism is generally made by people who never saw "Autocrat of Flapjack Junction" or "Love's Old Dream," or by rival actors. It is true that your true clown always is quick to utilize his physical peculiarities as accessories to his acting. The jesters of Marie

de Medici made fun of their own hunched backs or dwarfed forms. John Bunny had as good a right to turn his fatness into dramatic capital as Sarah Bernhardt has to do the same thing with her slenderness. It is a principle of subjective artistic expression — the same principle as that by which Heine made his little songs out of his great woes.

But the physical peculiarity alone is not enough. John Bunny was gifted by nature for his rôles. But he would have been a great clown even had he been built like John Drew. He would have made his shapeliness what he made his unshapeliness — something ridiculously amusing.

If fatness alone was the source of his success, how crowded his profession would now be! But this is not the case. Thousands, perhaps, of motion-picture audiences have watched Mr. Taft serenely cross the screen, or mutely seem to make a speech. Undoubtedly, they have thereby been edified. But they have not rocked from side to side with unextinguishable laughter, and thereafter burst into shouts of mirth at the mention of the ex-President's name.

No, people did not laugh at John Bunny because he was fat, or because he fell from horses and automobiles and aeroplanes, and submitted to various picturesque forms of assault and battery for their amusement. They laughed at him because he was fat humorously, because he fell from vehicles humorously, because he was a

great clown — that is, a master of a difficult and important branch of dramatic art.

The motion-picture producers may not be aware of the fact, but they have performed a valuable service to the stage in reviving the art of pantomime. The actor in the spoken drama will be less likely to be a mere voice when he sees his brother on the screen act with his whole body.

Is it possible that the importance of the human voice has been exaggerated? Certainly the mechanical reproduction of the spoken word has not captured the world's attention as has the reproduction of motion. The phonograph, of course, brings the lovely notes of the singers to ears that otherwise would never thrill with melody. It has been used as an instrument by which a political speaker might address at one time twenty audiences scattered across the continent, and it has delighted with humorous dialogue those who were far from theatres. But as an interpreter of great literature, the needle revolves impotently upon its waxen cylinder.

There have been successful attempts to synchronize the phonograph and the motion-picture machine, to cause the words to accompany the action. It may be that these devices will one day be widely popular. But I hope not. For that would destroy the greatest value of motion-picture acting, the silent but complete expression of thought. The motion picture is the renaissance of pantomime,

When Colley Cibber looked through his jeweled quizzing glass at a strange dumb-show drama newly brought to England from merry France, a representation of the legend of Venus and Mars, he said that it was "form'd into a connected presentation of Dances in Character, wherein the Passions were so happily expressed, and the whole Story so intelligibly told, by a mute Narration of Gesture only, that even thinking Spectators allow'd it both a pleasing and rational Entertainment." It was this "pleasing and rational Entertainment" which developed into the great English pantomime, which popular custom (always fond of tradition and ritual) honored by association with the mighty festival of Christmas.

And the English pantomime's greater descendant is to be seen on many a modern film. Still the vivacious lover flees from the comic policemen and the irate father, still Columbine is fair, although she bears a less beautiful name and has changed her airy spangled draperies for a modern garb.

Why has no enterprising producer given us a real old English pantomime in the films, with all the conventional characters? What a Columbine Mary Pickford would make! and how excellently would Charles Chaplin's deft stumble suit Harlequin! There could be transformation scenes that would delight the genial ghosts of Lamb and Thackeray. But who would be clown — now that John Bunny is dead?

The written word sometimes loses its power to bring laughter as the years roll by. Topical allusions, phrases, and sentiments that amuse us will bring no mirth to the hearts of our grandchildren. But there are certain things that are elementally funny, that make all people laugh who have any laughter in their souls. And one of these things is the face of John Bunny.

THE DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

. . .

OF course, people still ride on the elevated railways. But not the people who used to be taken over by their mothers from Jersey City on the Cortlandt Street Ferry about once every month, and then up Sixth Avenue by the elevated en route for the shops. These people now know the swift and monotonous tube train instead of the rakish ferryboat, the dull subway instead of the stimulating elevated railway. And even if they knelt upon the seats of the subway car, their rubbers projecting into the aisles and their faces pressed against the windows, they would see only blank walls and dismal stations instead of other people's Christmas trees.

These evanescent bits of glory lent special delight to aerial journeyings for weeks after Christmas. For, in defiance of the Twelfth Night convention, certain citizens were wont to keep their Christmas trees in place until February. And, in the opinion of the tenants of the third stories of the tenements (apartment houses is the more courteous word) which bordered the elevated, the place of the Christmas tree was close up against the front window, where all the world could enjoy its green and gold and red.

Like nearly all genuine vulgar customs (vulgar is used in its most honorable sense) this habit of showing the public the home's chief splendor was (or is, for undoubtedly first dressed for holiday still brighten some lower Sixth Avenue windows) based on generous courtesy. It was not possible for Mr. Tenement to keep open flat, so to speak, at Christmas time; to summon all Sixth Avenue in to partake of a bowl of wassail that steamed upon his gas range. But he performed all the hospitality that his ungentle residence allowed; he placed his bit of greenwood with its cardboard angel, its red paper bells, and its strings of tinsel, where it would give to the greatest possible number the same delight that its gave to its owner.

It is, you observe, in your own psychological way, the Rogers Group principle. Your grandmother put "Going For the Cows," you remember, on the marble top of the walnut table by the window in the front parlor. The Nottingham lace curtains were parted just above the head of the boy who was urging the dog after the woodchuck. And everybody who went up or down Maple Avenue got a good view of that masterpiece of realism. Therein your grandmother showed truer courtesy than did you when you put Rodin's "Le Baiser" in that niche above the second landing of your stairway.

The same quality of almost quixotic generosity is suggested by the composition of the old-

fashioned holly wreaths, which, hung in the windows, showed to passers-by lustrous green leaves and scarlet berries, and to those who hung them only a circlet of pale stems and wire. Even the lithographers maintain this courteous tradition; they stamp their cardboard holly wreaths on only one side. And this is the side which is to face the street.

Well, these fenestral firs and hollies exist, and they are among the numerous joys of the days that follow Christmas. These post-Christmas days shine with a light softer, but perhaps more comfortable, than that of the great feast itself.

Particularly is this true of the first day after Christmas — especially when that day is Sunday. In England, of course, as in the time of the late Samuel Pickwick, Esq., who brought about the renascence of Christmas, this is called Boxing Day, not because it is the occasion of fistic encounters, but because it is the time appointed for the distribution of those more or less spontaneous expressions of good will which are called Christmas boxes. Its more orthodox title is Saint Stephen's Day; it is, you know, the day on which the illustrious King Wenceslaus, with the assistance of his page, did his noble almoning. Says the old carol:

Good King Wenceslaus looked out
On the feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about,
Deep, and crisp, and even;

Brightly shone the moon that night,
 Though the frost was cruel;
 When a poor man came in sight,
 Gathering winter fuel.

“Hither, page, and stand by me,
 See thou dost it telling
 Yonder peasant, who is he,
 Where and what his dwelling?”
 “Sire, he lives a good league hence,
 Underneath the mountain,
 Over by the forest fence,
 By Saint Agnes fountain.”

“Bring me flesh and bring me wine,
 Bring me pine logs hither;
 Thou and I will see him dine,
 When we bear them thither.”
 Page and monarch forth they went,
 Forth they went together
 Through the night wind’s wild lament
 And the wintry weather.

We are not old English Kings, so instead of having our page bring flesh and wine to the poor man on Saint Stephen’s Day, we give a dollar to the youth from the still vexed Bermuthes who chaperons the elevator in our apartment house, and for weeks before Christmas we affix to the flaps of the envelopes containing our letters little stamps bearing libelous caricatures of Saint Nicholas of Bari. Theoretically this last process provides a modicum of Christmas cheer for certain carefully selected and organized poor people.

However this may be, the fact remains that the day after Christmas is a very good day, indeed.

The excitement of giving and receiving has passed away; there remains the quieter joy of contemplation. And since this year the day after Christmas is Sunday, this contemplation will not be disturbed by the arrival of the postman, who, a relentless bill-bringer, is, like the Greeks, to be feared even when bearing gifts.

And, in spite of the remarks of every humorist who ever borrowed from his mother-in-law two cents to put on an envelope which should carry a joke about her to an editor, this post-Christmas meditation nearly always is pleasant. It is assisted by the consumption of wife-bestowed cigars, which (again despite the humorists!) are better than those a man buys for himself. It is a pleasant meditation, for its subjects are things given and things received, good deeds done and good deeds experienced.

It also contains, this day-after-Christmas feeling, a quality of reconciliation. Not of reconciliation with ancient enemies — this was all orthodoxly attended to on Christmas Eve — but of reconciliation with affairs, of readjustment.

On Christmas Day there may have been some slight disappointment, some fly in the ointment, or, worse still, in the punch. Forgetting for a moment that you were just now pictured smoking cigars presented to you by your wife, let us consider you to be, as you probably are, a young woman of some eighteen Summers and perhaps an equal number of Winters. It is the day after Christmas; it is (although you are unaware

of the fact) Saint Stephen's Day. Yesterday, although you endeavored to conceal the fact, only revealing it in the unnecessary viciousness with which you scrubbed the remains of a red and white striped candy basket from the countenance of your infant brother—yesterday, I repeat, you were annoyed. And the cause of your annoyance was that you received from the amorous Theophilus a paltry dozen, instead of twenty-four or thirty-six, American Beauties. Now, however, during your post-Christmas meditation, your annoyance is swept away by the refreshing thought that Theophilus will now have twelve or twenty-four dollars more to invest in that extraordinary solitaire diamond ring with which he purposes to decorate your not too reluctant hand as soon as people begin to see through your bluff of not being engaged. This thought cheers you considerably, and you dreamily give the aforesaid infant brother permission to consume a barley sugar elephant, which makes him very unwell.

Or, let us, on the other hand, suppose that you, who are now reading this inquiry into the theory of motives and ideas, are that infant brother himself. Your age, we will say, is three, and you are, we regret to say, somewhat sticky. Nevertheless, your frame of mind is, on the whole, more satisfactory than it was yesterday. You had in all confidence requested Santa Claus to bring you a large live baboon. Instead, he brought you a small tin monkey on a stick.

This was a genuine disappointment, as poignantly felt as will be any more obvious tragedy of your adult years. But, like all sorrows of childhood, it had the blessed quality of brevity. Now, on the day after Christmas, you contemplate with favor your tin monkey. One of his legs is broken, but he has come off his stick, and is therefore the more agreeable companion. Your father's apology for Santa Claus — to the effect that the baboon of your desire would have walked off with your stockings if he had been placed in them — seems reasonable. And there is manna for your soul in the thought that your father will take you to the Bronx Zoo this afternoon, and that you then can show your tin monkey to the baboon that lives there.

This peaceful meditation is one of the most delightfully comfortable features of the day after Christmas. This day has not the concentrated excitement of Christmas. It is, I think, the most restful day in the year. It is not marked, like January 2, with the shock of receiving bills and the strain of keeping new resolutions. It is a delightfully lazy day, a sort of sublimated Sunday afternoon.

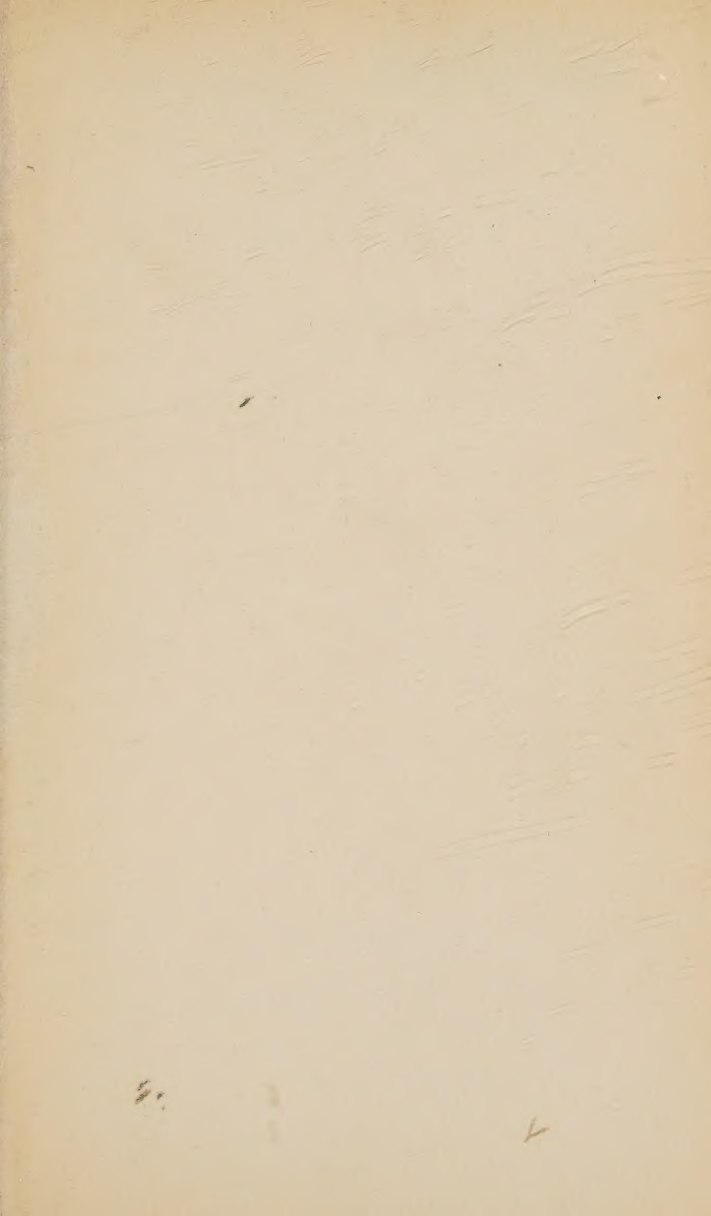
And one conclusion which you should draw from your St. Stephen's Day meditation is that the nobility of Christmas traditions and customs is proved by their surviving the most unfavorable, even absurd, conditions of life. It was not difficult for the Puritans to destroy the Maypole; its gay garlands never rose from the dust into

which their iron heels trod them. But the Christmas tree — which even more than the May-pole was an idolatrous abomination to those of our forefathers who turned “the sword of the Lord and of Gideon” against the primitive red citizens of New England — the Christmas tree blooms with new splendor every year. It is set up even in the conventicles and New Salems which the Pilgrims established, and as its green branches glow with their precious freight of scarlet and gold, around it dance — tango, in fact — the descendants of John Alden and Priscilla Mullens.

But the Christmas tree and its attendant glories have survived an assault sterner than that of the Puritans. They are healthily surviving modern metropolitan conditions — the deadly foe of many gracious things. And the mere fact of survival is itself beautiful. It is very fine, of course, for Santa Claus to clamber down the broad chimney of a great farmhouse. But it is really noble of him to penetrate the mysterious smokestacks of a New York building, and, making some subtle use, I suppose, of the steam radiator, to visit every apartment which has its complement of childhood. It is admirable for a country child to believe in Santa Claus; but how much more admirable is the faith of the city child, the faith which stands the shock of the imitation Santa Clauses who strut about the department stores and beg at every corner!

These things, I said, are natural fruits of after-Christmas meditations. And the Christmas

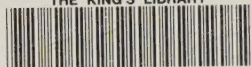
tree remains — although the gifts that surrounded it have been taken away, it is a pleasanter sight than it was yesterday, because it is already a beautiful old friend, a friend to whom we are grateful. It does not look ridiculous because its great day is gone, as, for example, a fire-cracker looks ridiculous on July 5. For Christmas is more than a day, it is a season, of which December 25 is only the commencement. And as the Christmas tree seems pleasanter and more friendly when some of its needles have formed little green aromatic heaps on the carpet, and when the china angel and two or three of the red glass balls have been taken down for the baby to play with — so does the Christmas season seem pleasanter and more friendly when its first great feast and pageant has come to its joyous close and become a part of time's rich treasury of golden days.



DATE DUE

--	--	--

THE KING'S LIBRARY



3000052045

